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Viewing cable 10ANKARA252, GREECE-TURKEY: A SLOW START, BUT FORWARD MOVEMENT

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
10ANKARA252	2010-02-16 13:59	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Ankara

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SUBJECT: GREECE-TURKEY: A SLOW START, BUT FORWARD MOVEMENT

REF: A. ATHENS 41

[1](#)B. ANKARA 57

[1](#)C. 09 ANKARA 1637

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons: 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Despite the eleven-week delay in Greek PM Papandreou's reply to PM Erdogan's October 30 overture, the

Turkish MFA indicates that it views the response as positive and as a sincere attempt "to address our issues." The MFA envisions a foreign minister-level bilateral meeting, possibly as soon as February 18, followed by a prime minister-level meeting no later than June. Both the MFA and the Greek Embassy concur that Cyprus and the Aegean loom largest in the bilateral relationship, but the Greek Embassy also warns that illegal migration has become an "explosive political issue" in Greece, given the sheer numbers of illegal migrants intercepted there. On Aegean issues, the MFA welcomed the "fresh start" to which the Greek side was apparently agreeing. Greek PM Papandreou is widely admired in Turkey for his "seismic diplomacy" efforts in the previous PASOK government. Ankara hopes to make the most of his return to power. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) The Turkish MFA's Deputy Director for Greece/Cyprus, Kerim Uras, told us that Ankara for the most part is pleased with the reply letter from Greece PM Papandreou to Turkish PM Erdogan. It is "overall a good letter," and "tried to address our issues," Uras said. The GOT had earlier grumbled about the significant delay for the response (Erdogan's letter was sent October 30 (REF C); the Papandreou reply came in mid-January) but said it recognizes that Athens has its hands full with its economic crisis, and that Papandreou also needed to ensure that diverse elements in his government were on board for his approach to Ankara. Uras suggested that the Papandreou government had not expected the Erdogan missive, but emphasized that the GOT had not wanted to catch the Greeks off guard but simply sought to make a comprehensive overture early in the Papandreou government's tenure.

13. (C) Uras said the Turkish MFA actually took issue with several elements in the Papandreou response. For example, the Greek PM's refusal to refer to "minorities" in Thrace, and also Papandreou's assertion that the two Cypriot communities should be left on their own to resolve the Cyprus Problem, without any outside engagement. Uras said this approach seems irresponsible, given that Greece has a significant role as a Guarantor Power, as does Turkey.

14. (C) We met separately with the Turkish MFA's Deputy Director for Maritime and Aviation Affairs Cagatay Erciyes (REF B). Erciyes (who gave us a copy of the page of Papandreou's letter which addressed Aegean issues) said that the Greek letter agreed to "re-energize" exploratory contacts which have taken place more than forty times over the past ten years. Erciyes said that while the letter did not respond directly to the proposals in Erdogan's letter for new confidence-building measures and an Aegean "code of conduct," the Greek side was "ready to discuss" them.

15. (C) In a separate discussion, the Greek Embassy's acting DCM, Stavros Venizelos, confirmed that the Papandreou letter discouraged any outside involvement in Cyprus, but noted that Greece's posture is more proactive than it might appear, and that Greece had actually lobbied hard with Christofias to ensure that the Greek Cypriot leader would agree to an accelerated schedule of talks leading up to the "TRNC Presidential" elections.

16. (C) Venizelos declined to give us a copy of the Papandreou letter, but briefed us on the main themes, in addition to Cyprus:

-- Aegean: (Erdogan had suggested re-energizing the exploratory talks and proposed CBMs and a code of conduct. (REF B)) On the former, Papandreou was receptive, but suggested a time limit, after which the issues would be brought to the International Court of Justice. In the meantime, both sides should refrain from "provocative statements." Ankara should cease overflights of inhabited islands.

-- Minorities: (Erdogan had pointed to various problems for the Turkish minority.) Papandreou insisted that Greece is obliged to respect the human rights of all Greek citizens. However, this is not a question of reciprocity. He in turn

argued for Ankara's attention toward the Patriarchate, Halki Seminary, and the rights of Greek Orthodox-origin Turkish citizens in Turkey.

-- Illegal Migration: Papandreou agreed that this is an

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important problem; welcomed the resumption of Turkey-EU talks on this issue; but urged improved implementation of the Greece-Turkey 2002 Readmission Protocol.

-- Economic Relations: (Erdogan had proposed allowing one- or two-day visa-free travel for Turkish citizens engaged in trade and commerce.) Papandreou noted that an MFA steering committee is examining this issue, but that Schengen regulations are inflexible and the EU has already disapproved of such an arrangement, but that Athens would ask again.

-- High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council: (Erdogan had proposed an overarching structure, featuring annual meetings between the two prime ministers together with many of their ministers.) Papandreou did not reject this proposal but suggested that a meeting at the FM-level begin to review it. He also stated that he would invite PM Erdogan to Greece sometime before June 2010. (Note: The Turkish MFA confirms that a PM-level meeting is envisioned but said the location remains unclear. End Note) Papandreou also suggested that individual ministers on both sides could explore issues such as energy, investment, culture, environment, transportation, illegal migration, and organized crime.

17. (C) Venizelos commented that the Aegean and Cyprus remain the two priority issues in the Greece-Turkey bilateral relationship, but that illegal migration is close behind. The latter has become an "explosive political issue" in Greece, he said, not least because 75 percent of all arrests in the EU of illegal migrants occur in Greece.

18. (C) COMMENT: PM Papandreou is held in high regard by most Turkish political elites, who remember fondly the "seismic diplomacy" era encapsulated by Papandreou's constructive association with the late Turkish FM Ismail Cem. Accordingly, Ankara hopes to make the most of Papandreou's return to power, as another element in its "zero problems with neighbors" posture. We learned February 15 that a Greece-Turkey FM-level meeting might take place as early as February 18 in Istanbul.
Jeffrey

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